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ABSTRACT

This booklet is designed to explore some of the major areas of concern for a principal, especially for new principals and for assistant principals who aspire to the principalship. Emphasis is on the practical application of alternative courses of action. The booklet is organized according to the following categories: the nature of the job, administrative theories, categorical considerations (scheduling, staff utilization, negotiations, communications, accountability, student discipline), awareness, planning, inservice and evaluation, morale, and legal factors. Ten specific tips on how to perform in the role of the principal are included. (Author/IRT)

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The cover photograph was provided through the courtesy of Liberty Senior High School in Liberty, Mo. With principal James Travis (now an assistant superintendent for secondary education in Center School District in Kansas City, Mo.) are Liberty students, left to right, Sheri Johnsen, Graham Houston, Paula Kastner, John McCoy, Tammy Shaw, Tim Fish, Kevin Houston, Beth Davis, Donna Dorsey, Mike Hoyt, Kathy Adams, Gordon Kingsley, Jr., Tim Rogers, and Barbara Buell.

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# Foreword

Becoming a school principal is a momentous occasion for many reasons. One of the most important is that the principalship is clearly a position of top leadership. No other person in a school has such complete responsibility for the instruction and supervision of so many youngsters.

The responsibility is mind-boggling, too, in that students, parents, teachers, and the community all look to the principal for inspiration and direction. It is a key position requiring the energy and skills of only the most competent candidates.

NASSP is dedicated to assisting principals of the nation's secondary schools through a variety of services: publications, student programs, legal aid, insurance, inservice conferences, meetings and conventions, to name just a few. The Association also has several standing committees that focus on the special needs of principals and assistant principals.

Although no single publication can purport to be *the* handbook to the principalship, *So Now You're a Principal* contains many thoughtful tips on coping with the multitude of concerns that cross the principal's desk daily. Our author, Mel Heller, brings to these pages his perspectives as a former principal and superintendent, and now a professor training administrators. We think that both the new and experienced principal will find his advice appropriate and stimulating.

Owen B. Kiernan
NASSP Executive Secretary

# Introduction

*Principal* means *most important, chief, main.* No matter what his style of leadership and/or management, the principal must be the main person in terms of accountability and direction for the total school.

Recent developments, primarily in negotiated agreements and in legal decisions in the realm of civil rights, have made many principals too cautious to be effective leaders. Certainly, the principal in today's schools must be aware of his legal restraints, but he must also be aware of his rights to administer a school.

This booklet is designed to explore some of the major areas of concern for a principal, especially for new principals and assistant principals who aspire to the principalship. Emphasis will be on the practical applications of alternative courses of action befitting a school leader.

Experienced principals who may be somewhat disdainful of this book's basic nature should remind themselves that simple approaches can lead to effective solutions to complicated problems. Simple approaches are disarming as well as easily employed.

# 1. Nature of the Job

*Framework*

Strong leaders need strong followers. Likewise, the greater teacher power that grew from teacher militancy has proven that strong followers need strong leaders. The key word is *strong*. Perhaps several synonyms for *strong* as used in this context are *committed, dedicated, zealous*. Seldom is *zealous* used to describe educational leaders, for obvious reasons, but there is a place for zealousness in education. Zealous, positive, direct approaches to educational leadership need not be restricted to reacting to major and minor crises.

No matter what the intellectual and emotional faults to be found among board members and the superintendent, the principal must be a conspicuous leader. His style is a matter of strategy and personality, but his strength in leadership must be evident to the staff and to the community.

A principal can hide behind the policies of a board, the mandates of the superintendent, the demands of the teacher union, and the wishes of the community, but he is the principal—the *main* "something"—in the building. With strength, dedication, and zealous commitment to leadership, the principal can be the *main leader* in the school. He is the legally responsible head. He has some power of position. He is a designated leader who cannot shirk his obligations.

To pretend that management details of a clerical nature prevent him from exercising organizational and instructional leadership is folly. With simple delegation and/or avoidance of some clerical tasks, the principal will be able to find some time each week to plan his school's direction. If he becomes effective in planning, he may learn to like that aspect of leadership and therefore find more time for it. He may not only learn to like planning, but he may also realize that his plans will require his leadership for implementation.

Once this realization has occurred, he can find the opportunities to demonstrate the courage of his convictions. The principal of today is often stereotyped in nondescript terms. The principal who does not fit the stereotype will be conspicuous by that fact alone.

*Levels of Concern*

It must be stated at the outset that the principal must know the nature of his job. So many overwhelming influences can affect the principal on the

job that he must be able to determine what he can control and what he cannot control. In other words, he must be able to distinguish between what is within his area of operation and what is beyond him and, therefore, what he must accept. There are issues such as financial crises, militancy among teachers and students, federal priorities affecting curriculum, general social conditions in the community, accountability, school board policies, and uncooperative superintendents.

All of these issues have a direct influence upon the principal's role, but they must be viewed realistically. He need not accept these factors and influences with stoic determination or with fatalistic resignation, but he must realize that his job deals with the school building and not with solving all the problems in the world in 10 easy lessons. These issues and forces are so overwhelming that if the principal spends all his time dealing with them, he will not have time to manage the school.

In terms of the management and leadership of the school, he and he alone is responsible. Certainly, the staff and his superiors in the line and staff organization will have something to say about the scope and nature of his responsibilities, but there can be no doubt that the principal must work effectively in management and in instructional leadership areas if he truly is to be a principal. Everyone who has been a principal is well aware of the truth of that statement.

Many, however, who aspire to be principals, do not see the many pitfalls and problems along the way. After just a few weeks on the job, some of the realities should be apparent. The promise of attendance at a mid-year convention may lose some appeal to the new principal whose school has been vandalized. Pot parties and alcoholic antics involving students and the ensuing obligations of court appearances may cause some principals to long for the serene days of years gone by. Poor academic achievement of non-athletes may be a source of great anxiety for the principal.

The job of leading a staff of teachers, clerks, and custodians to achieve clear goals as well as vague objectives is not a task for the average person.

Principals who can help peers to understand the demands of the job are valuable. The profession needs their stimulation and direction. Too often speakers at regional and national conventions and contributors to journals do not relate well with the practitioner.

The new principal can seek help from experienced principals whom he admires and respects. If, for example, a new principal can observe the participatory style of leadership in action, he can learn from the wounds

of the scarred veterans that care is needed. The inexperienced, untried principal may be full of new ideas and new solutions, but he should learn quickly that his mistakes will be more obvious than his achievements.

## Duties

Texts on the principalship usually include lists of what the job entails. Among the most frequently mentioned tasks are these:

1. Scheduling
2. Budgeting
3. Working with community groups
4. Motivating the staff
5. Working with students
6. Providing instructional leadership
7. Supervising classrooms
8. Attending meetings
9. Communicating with various publics
10. Developing transportation routes
11. Developing rules and regulations for:
    a. Attendance
    b. Health and safety
    c. Student placement
    d. Reporting to parents
    e. Supplies
12. Providing "proper" image.

A new principal can check this list to see whether he has forgotten anything as well as to add those things omitted. Regardless of the specific tasks to be added, subtracted, or modified, the list presented is proof positive of the complexity of the job.

Not even the most outstanding competency-based training programs can guarantee success for each task. Parenthetically, the very nature of competency-based programs is questionable when one realizes that theory oriented, non-practicing principals are generally the people who diagnose, prescribe, implement, and evaluate the competencies.

## Reacting to Criticism

The principal will have to learn not to be so thin-skinned that every criticism puts him into a dither. The very nature of his role puts him in a visible and vulnerable position. The community will know things about him whether he wishes them to or not. Certainly, some secrets can be kept, and rightfully so, but many aspects to one's personality and way of operating cannot be hidden, no matter how skillful the attempt to do so.

Many community residents, many staff members, many non-certificated employees, and many students will react to the principal's smile, frown, clothing style, hairstyle, glasses, automobile, and vocabulary. The principal must realize that no matter how impeccable his dress or behavior someone will scoff at his mannerisms, conduct, or appearance.

If a new principal does not have enough confidence in himself to weather the storm of criticism, he will be a very unhappy person, especially since so many criticisms are unjustified in the first place. Communities, staff members, students, and other groups are not known for their patience prior to attacking any issue or any stance held by a leader.

Newspaper reporters have been known to report the news inaccurately, if one can believe the allegations of misquoted and offended administrators. The world of politics provides excellent and numerous examples of public officials who proclaim with or without eloquence that they are honest and above reproach no matter what the evidence as reported in the newspapers, on radio, and on television.

If the principal is truly a man of integrity, he will have little to fear when he examines his own conscience. The trick is to convince others that he should not be maligned. Unfortunately, not everyone will love the principal—not even his secretary.

The principal has little choice but to realize that he will be a convenient target for criticism that can come at any time from any source and from any direction. To the degree that he can protect his flanks successfully, he will be able to handle the criticism without loss of patience and without loss of self-esteem. However, to the degree that the criticism renders him ineffective, he will be an easy target for any and all.

For the new principal, the realization that criticism is inevitable is difficult enough. The real test of his ability is to handle criticism that he considers to be unfair, unfounded, and unnecessary, especially from those whom he has trusted.

The principal cannot remain indifferent to this major problem of criticism. No amount of advice can save him from critical attacks. Advice can only serve to keep him ever vigilant so that he can overcome the tendency to be super-sensitive to whatever his critics say.

The personal and professional adjustment to receiving criticism does not mean that the criticism should be ignored. No one is above criticism, not even those elected to high office. The principal cannot react to every

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criticism, but certainly he should take into consideration what his critics are saying.

Pressures

Many pressures affect the principalship. The new principal will soon learn that many groups, organizations, and individuals will try to dictate what and how he should be and do. Some of these are pressure groups and make no bones about that fact. Others are groups that resent the name of pressure but exert pressure, nevertheless.

The techniques vary but the following are common means of trying to exert pressure: petitions, mass meetings, protests, boycotts, walk-outs, strikes, newspaper ads, radio and TV presentations, phone calls, and attendance at board meetings.

A listing of some of the kinds of groups which try to involve themselves in school affairs may benefit the new principal:

1. patriotic groups
2. religious groups
3. civic groups
4. service groups
5. parent groups
6. teacher groups
7. student groups
8. chamber of commerce.

Most of these groups have clear purposes that are easily understood by the principal. Many of them, however, have multi-purposes and/or hidden purposes. The new principal must be aware of what the issue is when groups such as those mentioned try to influence him in the performance of his duties.

In addition to pressure groups, all individuals experience many personal and psychological pressures. To list these would belabor the obvious but to ignore them would be foolish. The important point to remember is that regardless of the source or type of pressure that the principal faces, all of them consume valuable time.

The principal who is unaware of the tactics and the purposes of the organizational pressures, and who is unable to cope with personal and psychological pressures, will have a difficulty with his time budget. If he is unable to organize and use his time efficiently, he will undoubtedly become frustrated in getting to the task at hand. Pressures can weaken an individual's determination to do a job, they can make him resentful, they can make him defensive, and they can confuse him.

The new principal should do his best to determine which pressure groups will attempt to manipulate him, and which pressure groups he can ignore. Perhaps he can have a heart-to-heart discussion with the superintendent to learn what the superintendent considers appropriate

means of working with pressure groups. In some instances, the principal's strategies and insights do not square with those of the superintendent.

Since the superintendent is in charge of the entire district, it behooves the principal to know what the chief executive and the school board consider to be proper and/or improper relationships with pressure groups. To ignore this source of advice and direction is to look for trouble. Once pressure groups know that the principal and superintendent do not see eye to eye on their means and purposes, they may initiate divisive tactics, and the school environment can become unbearable.

Although the principal is in charge of the building and the superintendent is in charge of the district, the pressure group is in charge of nothing except its own purposes. The principal who spends the majority of his time working with and around pressure groups will have no time to tend to the daily routine of the building, to the planning for future objectives, to the supervision of classroom activities, to needed conferences with children and teachers, and to the supervision of the supporting staff.

It is obvious, therefore, that the principal cannot become a slave to the whim or to the time demands of pressure groups, whether these be organized, direct, formal, informal, or self-induced.

## *Management Skills*

Although the managerial aspects of the principalship are not glamorous, the principal must have some skill in management or his school will fall apart. The need to be a good manager is especially important if there is any movement in the school towards an innovative program. Despite the false pundits who proclaim that innovation requires an openness and a freedom to move without restraints, a school as an institution cannot exist without rules and regulations, which the principal must enforce through his staff. Managerial skills, therefore, cannot be treated lightly.

Basic management skills are often disregarded and/or relegated to a low priority by principals. New principals may have fresh, current viewpoints, but too many of them spend their time developing an image or rapping with any and all. The values of an effective image and of positive staff morale cannot be denied, but the most wonderful personality is no substitute for good basic management.

True, an affable charmer can get away with minimal skills far longer than an unfriendly introvert. After a while, however, no amount of charm and sensitivity training can overcome staff dissatisfaction with sched-

ules, lack of materials, student rudeness, and poor communications. If the principal himself cannot manage well, he must delegate this responsibility. In no case, however, can he be free from the responsibility and the authority to manage, regardless of the degree of delegation.

Management, therefore, cannot be ignored by the successful principal. He can exercise his managerial strengths through many strategies and through many organizational devices. He can involve teachers in as much or as little committee work as he deems necessary. He can plan the nature of inservice programs. He can plan the agenda for staff meetings. He can distribute memos on topics of his choice sent to staff members of his choice. He can order materials, texts, and supplies to arrive on time. He can determine the schedule of classes. Principals who are experts in public relations, morale building, and ethical maneuvering can use management skills to achieve their goals.

The choice, the variety, and the means of exercising managerial skills depend upon the talent, the interest, the personality, and the dedication of the principal. To discuss these matters at length would be ludicrous because the variety admits no limit. To ignore this aspect of the principalship, however, would be equally ludicrous because without plans, without organization, and without the managerial expertise to implement the purposes of the school the school will not be a school. It will be something else where goals, where structure, where rules, where civility may or may not exist.

Although there is no right or wrong way of managing, teaching, or learning absolutely, there are many approaches which do not work for anyone. One of these approaches is the encouragement of chaos. The latter is inevitable when managerial skills do not exist or are not put into proper perspective.

All the talk about accountability is meaningless if the principal is not accountable and responsible in terms of the management aspect of his job. Use and awareness of "in-words" are mere sham when the organization of the school is poor. Dirty buildings and poorly lit classrooms are frustrating to neat, enlightened teachers and students. If the cleaning schedule is poor in itself or in its implementation, the principal must accept the blame when the custodian's union is too strong to accept censure.

The management tasks, ranging from collection of student fees to delegating sponsorship of activities among the faculty, must be handled personally or through delegation by the principal. He is the legal head of

the building and is, therefore, responsible for its efficiency. The means and strategies, however important, are a matter of style. The necessity to get the job done is a matter of responsibility.

A new principal has many opportunities to minimize the management aspects of the job. Meetings, luncheons, community service, and parental conferences take a great deal of time. Planning and philosophizing take even more time. No matter how valuable these activities may be, they are often intangibles. They should be continued, but there must be some time for the tangibles of management (scheduling, developing handbooks, distributing notices, etc.).

## Related Nassp Publications

*NASSP Advisory List of National Contests and Activities* (Published yearly)

*The Senior High-School Principalship*, 1965

*The Junior High-School Principalship*, 1966

*The Assistant Principalship*, 1970

*The Principalship: Job Specifications and Salary Considerations for the 70's*, 1970

*NASSP Bulletin*, "Professionalism: A Constant in Change," October 1971

*Management Crisis: A Solution*, 1971

*NASSP Bulletin*, "The Principal and PPBS," October 1972

*NASSP Bulletin*, "Perspectives on the Principalship," December 1972

*Theory and Practice of the Administrative Team*, 1973

*Secondary Schools in a Changing Society. This We Believe*, 1975

# 2. Administrative Theories

Theories of administration abound in texts, journal articles, and position papers. The problem for a principal is intelligent selection rather than a dearth of options. Some of the theories are borrowed directly from the management field, all are derived from psychology, and some are quite practical.

Many of the theories are presented as models and/or diagrams. These drawings can be helpful, as the jargon used to describe most theories is unnecessarily abstruse. Unfortunately, some of the diagrams are as confusing as the verbal explanations. The arrows seem to point everywhere—within, around, and about the circles. Reduced to their essence, the theories are simply autocratic or democratic, task oriented or people oriented. Perhaps the combination of words and models is intended to be part of a mystique. Certainly, they obfuscate rather than delineate, elucidate, illuminate, and titilate.

Several sources can be used by a new principal who is interested in educational theory: books in administration in education and industrial management, specific books on theory, theses and dissertations on the topic, journal articles, and conferences. The theories that are prevalent today are a blend of philosophy, psychology, and sociology with an occasional reference to political science. Graduate students are well acquainted with the views of Maslow, Getzels, Guba, Herzberg, Drucker, and McGregor.

New principals recently promoted from the teaching ranks may have been too busy working to do much theorizing. Since it is never too late to learn about the major theories of administration, the new principal can test his strategies by becoming acquainted with the major theories.

The most popular theories of administration deal with democratic leadership, usually called participatory leadership. Motivation, participation, involvement, cooperation, and persuasion are key concepts in these theories. This emphasis is no surprise to those who have had experience in encounter groups and guidance seminars. Currently, shared decision making and shared authority are regarded as desirable and necessary. Whether these theories remain popular depends in a great measure upon how adept administrators are in implementing effective participatory leadership.

The many sociological, psychological, and political reasons for trying to involve people in decision making are well known. Surprisingly, however, the responsibility for the decisions rests with the administrator and not with those who contribute mightily to the decision. No record exists of members of citizens committees, faculty representatives, key students or other in-put experts being fired along with the principal who sought their participation. Democratic involvement of those affected by the decisions is a respected plan, but it has some inherent dangers.

To disregard participatory leadership is ridiculous. Autocratic leadership that ignores community, staff, and student needs and interests is a fool's game. A common-sense blend of participatory and autocratic leadership may not guarantee job security, but it gets the job done.

No matter what the theory of administration, its practicality is measured in terms of its consequences. In today's age of accountability, principals who do not meet their objectives can be replaced by stern types who achieve goals. Since the existing theories are varied in themselves as well as in their eclectic blends, the principal can and must find his own framework. Forewarned is forearmed.

Sometimes when children are young and impressionable, they study the lives of heroes who become their models. Similarly, the new principal may benefit from studying the leadership style and the leadership successes of a variety of fellow principals in addition to consulting abstract theories. Fortunately, there is no one best type of leadership.

The only true test of leadership is followership. Whether that followership is obtained through Style A or through Style Z is a matter of talent, interest, attitude, intelligence, and luck. Style, theoretical model, and other factors notwithstanding, some principals are judged as successful by peers, by superiors, by friends, and by foes. The new principal who studies these leadership types diligently will be able to decide which aspects of which styles suit him.

Today the science of administration is compared with the art of administration. Both are important. The person who is very artful but who has little knowledge will not last long in a trying situation. The person who is knowledgeable but is unable to apply his knowledge in an artful way will also have difficulties in holding a job.

## Related Nassp Publications

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*Administrative Appraisal: A Step to Improved Leadership*, 1972
*NASSP Bulletin*, Defining Leadership, November 1973
*Principals: An Organized Force for Leadership*, 1974

# 3. Categorical Considerations

## Scheduling

Principals should explore the best means of scheduling students and teachers in the school. In recent years, newer forms of scheduling, particularly modular scheduling, have aroused much interest. Administrators who know nothing about modular scheduling should not try to implement it until they are completely familiar with all its ramifications.

Modular schedules can be very very rigid and inflexible. Certainly, examples of good modular schedules do exist. A great deal of inservice training for teachers and students is necessary for these kinds of schedules to be used most effectively. If a new principal is concerned about his ability to initiate such a schedule, by all means he should avoid that approach until he knows himself and his staff better.

The needed change in schedules can be effected very simply through a block of time or through a rotation schedule. The new principal who may be inexperienced in schedule making may not realize the kinds of philosophical and psychological pressures which result when a drastic change in schedule is made. Therefore, if he wants to do something different and better in his school for a given year, he can begin something that is simple, easily implemented, and easily changed if necessary.

Block scheduling is certainly one of these efforts to consider. In a block of time, the principal will provide teachers and students with more options than any rigid schedule will give them. If the teachers and students are unable to handle the kinds of decisions necessary in a large block of time, this problem can be discovered immediately. These difficulties can serve as inservice topics and/or as reasons for changing the schedule as presented.

A rotation schedule which admits of a variety of types can also provide simple, effective, and speedy variation in the school day. Merely by rotating the order of class periods so that one day the school begins with period 2 and period 1 is the last period of the day, another day the school beings with period 3, and periods 1 and 2 are at the tail-end of the day, and so on, will provide a change of pace for a staff.

Rotation schedules can be used to provide double periods, six or more days per cycle, or other purposes appropriate for the school. The advantages of rotation schedules include ease of implementing and ease of determining whether the teachers can stand simple change.

Many principals, experienced as well as inexperienced, believe that their staffs can work wonders and effect miracles. A simple evaluation of a school often tends to refute these beliefs. If there is danger in changing the schedule drastically, by all means the inexperienced principal should avoid this particular pitfall. He will have enough problems to contend with, without meeting the schedule problem head-on in a major way. Again, if the principal desires some change in the schedule, a simple rotation plan or a more challenging block schedule plan should precede any movement toward a modular schedule. Those who insist upon modular scheduling should solicit the assistance of experts in computerized scheduling.

If the new principal inherits a modular schedule, or any other type of schedule that is esoteric, costly, and complicated, perhaps the wisest plan of action should be to maintain the schedule while he gathers information from staff, students, and community prior to making any kind of a change. The essence of the point made here is simply that the principal should know what he is doing before he tries to do it.

In terms of schedule considerations, one of the distinct advantages for a new principal is that he can refer to his predecessor for whatever difficulties exist in the present organization. The new principal can spend his time intelligently if he sincerely looks for difficulties in the existing schedule, and then can provide the leadership to remedy the problems. If he merely complains, he will gain the support of those who did not like what his predecessor did, but he will not win any points with those who are interested in improving the school situation.

The principal can become expert as a complainer, a whiner, or a critic, but the achievement of those skills may not serve the school well. If he is able to improve what he is criticizing, the happy results may lead the school into the kind of schedule which best suits its purposes.

## *Staff Utilization*

Whenever a principal considers the human resources aspects of his staff, he will realize that all teachers are not the same. In other words, teachers are not interchangeable parts. To assign one or another according to some slot to be filled, rather than on the basis of talent and interest relative to filling that slot, is to ignore the findings of the many staff utilization studies.

When the concept of staff utilization was first popularized in the late 1950s and the early 1960s, many schools tried to differentiate assignments of teachers for a variety of reasons. Changes in schedules resulted,

notably modular schedules; changes in staff assignments resulted, notably large group, small group, and individualized study experts; and changes in student options resulted, notably choices among teachers and subjects on the basis of some kind of ranking system.

Staff utilization soon became a broad label for any effort to improve the schools. The major aspects of staff utilization that we still have with us are team teaching, individualized study programs, and schedule modifications.

The most important aspect of staff utilization, however, has not yet found its way into the majority of high schools. This aspect is the use of teachers according to their own abilities, interests, talents, and energy levels.

A principal need not get involved with major innovative approaches, such as team teaching and differentiated staffing, in order to utilize the staff effectively. He will learn very quickly that many of the teachers are unable to relate effectively with students no matter what the criteria. He will also notice very quickly that some teachers have difficulties in developing intelligent tests. If the principal is clever, he will realize that he has some weaknesses as well as several strengths, many of which are recognized only by him and by the ones who appointed him. If staff utilization concerns are paramount in a school, the teachers will be organized to capitalize on their strengths rather than on their weaknesses and/or on their inertia.

Staff utilization is not a new topic. Any principal who is unaware of what the movement has produced can find out readily from textbooks, journal articles, and from the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Most principals are familiar with NASSP's J. Lloyd Trump and his contributions to the field of staff, time, facilities, and financial utilization. Those who are not aware of Trump's work can be informed easily by making a quick trip to a library or contacting the Association.

Since Trump began his work much has been done in the field. It is no longer a secret that the human resources of teachers and students must be encouraged and nurtured in the schools of today. The students have become more aware, more alert, and more vocal. If educators do not lead from strengths and do not employ some simple human relations techniques, they will soon find themselves confronted by militant students and their parents.

Staff utilization studies and projects remind all of us that not all educators are equal. With intelligent assignment of their talents, how-

ever, their strengths can be made available to a greater number of students than any conventional class assignment will allow.

Thus, staff utilization merely means using the staff most effectively. The new principal can read the diaries of his predecessors to find out why they failed. Armed with this knowledge, he should be able to meet the challenge. If not, he can add his entries for his successor to heed.

## Negotiations

The confusion regarding the role of the principal in matters of negotiations still exists. In some school districts, the principal is on the management team. He serves as an active negotiator. In some school districts, the principal is not involved at all in matters of negotiations. In most school districts, he plays some role in between the two extremes. Generally, the principal is considered as management and is at least implicitly on the board's side.

The most important role for the new principal is to find out from the superintendent what is expected of him in matters of negotiations. What his role should be is a decision for the central office authorities.

Many new principals may be eager to provide answers and directions for negotiable items. They are willing to share their great wisdom and insights with anyone who will listen. With negotiations on the increase, administrators must exercise caution and skill to avoid falling into traps well laid by the teacher groups.

A new principal, unless he has had experience serving as the union president, may create major problems with a careless remark. The principal, no matter how much experience he has as an administrator, cannot be excused for ignorance of implications or unawareness of issues when negotiations are concerned. Everything said, or unsaid, can have serious consequences in this power struggle.

A precise prescription for principals relative to negotiations is difficult. The issues, the roles, and the stakes are not always clear. Details and analyses abound in the professional literature, with the most comprehensive coverage again developed by the National Association of Secondary School Principals. The ramifications of negotiations and the process itself warrant the best efforts of everyone involved.

No matter what the particulars, however, the new principal will have to get answers to several important questions including these:

- How restrictive is the negotiated agreement?
- How much support can be expected from the superintendent and from the board of education?

- How does implementation of the negotiated agreement relate to the evaluation of the principal's performance?
- How did school districts get involved with negotiations in the first place?

## Communications

Communications play an important part in the job of the principal. Certainly, there is no accounting for style. Some principals are more verbose than others, some are more penetrating than others, some are more insightful than others, and some are more clever than others.

The simple approach to communications, however, can be learned best from any basic text in English composition. These texts usually state that written and oral communication should be clear, concise, and coherent. The principal who has difficulty in understanding the meaning of these three directions from grammar books can find out how effective his teachers of English are by asking them to explain what the three words mean.

The opportunity for one to use his own style of expression is not to be regarded lightly. If one tries to communicate in a way which is alien to him, that way may cause some problems, at least temporarily. If the alien way, however, is a distinct improvement, the necessary adjustment is worth the effort.

If the principal has difficulties in using the intercom, he can please the staff and student body by avoiding it. Similarly, the principal who has trouble writing his thoughts should not compose many bulletins, especially those which are sent to the parents. The teachers will notice quickly when the bulletins are poorly written. The principal has nothing to gain but much to lose if he shares his poor communication skills with any audience. If a review of Rhetoric 101 does not help and if a course in writing is not of value, the principal should delegate the task of writing to someone else.

Some principals are expert in expressing their thoughts orally and in writing. These principals can write excellent memos, they can clarify rules and regulations, and they can give intelligent speeches to parents, students, and staff groups. These principals can serve as models for their fellow principals in means of expression. Even these principals who are expert in communication skills can profitably improve themselves so that their excellence becomes even greater.

Those who express themselves poorly will have to learn to improve upon their communication skills if the job is to be held past the tenure of

the present superintendent. This task is difficult. As mentioned, sometimes delegation is a better approach than self-reliance. Principals who have serious difficulty in expressing their thoughts should assign the task to others.

In addition to using the time gained for worthwhile activities, the nonverbal principal who delegates communication duties can develop the image of the silent type. Those who do not know him well may not realize that his silence is a cover-up for poor expression. Many who meet him for the first time will believe his silence is due to deep concentration on serious thoughts which affect the lives of the staff and the students who are his responsibility.

## Accountability

Accountability is one of education's "in" words. Reduced to its essence, the accountability movement merely asks that schools identify what they are trying to do and demonstrate what they have identified. Much time and effort have been spent in inservice programs and in workshops for administrators and teachers. Whether or not one agrees with the intent of the accountability movement, at the present time, the tide is difficult to stem.

Rather than fight what would be a losing battle, at least temporarily, the new principal should waste little time in determining for himself what his objectives shall be. Similarly, he should waste little time in helping the staff to determine their objectives. No matter which form the objectives take, if they start with a simple verb such as *list, name, identify, recall, illustrate, label,* etc., the teachers of any given subject and the administrator of any kind of secondary school can complete the sentence to express what is intended. It is of little value to anyone to quibble over the many semantic differences between one verb and another. If teachers and administrators will simply state the kinds of purposes that they have in mind, this initial list can serve as a starting point for the final refined list.

It is important to recognize that accountability includes responsibility. Much has been written about these two topics, and it serves no purpose to repeat what has been handled so clearly by so many authors and spokesmen. The fact that there is still rampant confusion about these topics should not cause any new principal to worry needlessly.

First of all, the majority of administrators do not understand what the accountability movement means. Second, the majority of teachers do not understand or care what the accountability movement means unless the specifics are contained in a master contract of some kind. Third, the

community involvement movement has not gathered the head of steam which community leaders have desired and coveted for many years. Fourth, school board members seldom give high priority to the accountability movement unless irate citizens complain about something. In the fifth place, the accountability movement has been identified with competency-based programs, performance criteria programs, criterion-referenced programs, and state mandated listings of objectives.

If these points can be clarified and supported by law, the success of the movement will be assured. If these points confuse or bother teachers and administrators, the movement will die of inertia as has been the fate of many innovative attempts to improve the schools in the past. In the meantime, the schools are regarded as accountable for student achievement, no matter how obscure the specifics may be.

Rather than philosophize about the concept of accountability, action is needed. Action can be based upon a commitment or it can be based upon a pragmatic acceptance of something that must be done. Some very simple steps can be followed to get the job accomplished:

- The principal and the teachers can express desired roles.
- The determination of the correct verb to indicate the intention can be made.
- The means of assessing success or failure or something in between can be determined.
- The list can be revised according to rank or feasibility.
- The list can be circulated among staff members for reaction.
- The reactions can suggest further modification.
- Attention can be paid to other important aspects of the school program besides accountability concerns.

## Student Discipline

No one knows the secret of good student discipline. Students are restless for a variety of reasons far beyond the scope of the school. Schools can add to the restlessness by providing irrelevant curricula, inappropriate structural controls (too rigid or too loose), and out-dated teachers. The problem is too complex for a new principal to solve no matter how well intentioned. The best to be hoped for in some schools is that the few dissidents will focus their efforts in projects not associated with the school.

Fortunately, the great majority of students are responsible citizens who want order and peace in their schools. The new principal is armed with charm and warmth, but when the charm fades and the warmth chills

because the offender offends, a censure may be appropriate. That censure may range from extra assignments for the culprit to corporal punishment (if authorized by state statute) to suspension or even expulsion.

Many situational factors exist, but the new principal must keep in mind the laws of the state and the policies of the school district, remembering, too, that he should use moderation in all matters.

Except in a few schools, students need not be feared. Reasonable people, even those who may express themselves poorly, tend to act reasonably. Student discipline, as all discipline, is a mental habit of orderliness. The habit can be developed by anyone and everyone, young and old. Since a habit is the result of a repeated action, the importance of a worthy model for emulation is apparent.

Although the challenge is great, the new principal can strive to be such a model for the staff and for the student body. Those who emulate him may not become better students but they may become so well disciplined that others will be allowed to study. That state of affairs will be beneficial to all schools, even those with good reputations.

## Related Nassp Publications

*The Principal's Role in Collective Negotiations Between Teachers and School Boards*, 1965
*What Is Negotiable?* 1969
*Principals and Grievance Procedures*, 1969
*NASSP Bulletin*, "Authority Crisis in Our Schools," February 1971
*Administering a Negotiated Contract*, 1973
*NASSP Bulletin*, "The Principal and Public Relations," January 1974
*NASSP Bulletin*, "Will Accountability Work?" March 1974
*NASSP Bulletin*, "Accountability: A Long Journey," September 1974
*NASSP Bulletin*, "Responsibility and the Active Student Leader," October 1974
*NASSP Bulletin*, "Student Behavior," January 1975
*The 12th Grade: A Critical Year*, 1975
*School Violence and Vandalism*, 1975
*The Reasonable Exercise of Authority* (Revised, 1975)

# 4. Awareness

## Rationale

In many school districts, some teachers are taking advantage of professional growth opportunities. Their motivation may be a higher place on the salary schedule, but the fact remains that they are attending workshops and enrolling in university courses. Many principals, on the other hand, have to remain in their schools to supervise and plan. While new principals may be as professionally aware as some of the teachers, there is a chance that the newly appointed principal who has served a long time as an assistant has been too busy with delegated tasks to keep abreast of recent developments, especially in the areas of curriculum and methodology.

To minimize any gap in knowledge between the administrator and the staff, the principal can take some clear, simple steps:

- Read professional magazines in order to keep current.
- Read the table of contents in professional magazines to keep aware of what is considered proper for publication.
- Talk with salesmen, particularly to book salesmen to learn the basics of new programs.
- Spend some time at several curriculum exhibits at conventions.
- Write to another principal in another state for an explanation of a relevant issue.
- Discuss anything with an educational theorist to keep humble.

Actually, a principal need not be as expert in instructional matters as he hopes his teachers have become, but he must be more than superficially conversant with conventional and innovative programs, methods, and materials.

Moreover, he must be able to stimulate the teachers to question their teaching. If the principal knows a little about a lot, he can use his knowledge to open the door for more learning, for inquiry sessions, and for needs-assessment activities. He can utilize his nominal awareness to play the devil's advocate without worrying about covering up his great knowledge. He can attend departmental meetings to learn as well as to assess the content of a course of study. A good way to bring esoteric teachers to earth is to ask them to give a clear rationale for what they are teaching.

In addition to some unhappy situations, experiences with behavioral objectives have sharpened the instructional program for many teachers.

The principal who knows just enough to probe into the teaching-learning environment can cause improvements. Teachers who are not certain of how much he knows will have to improve and/or justify the status quo just to remain respectable. Much progress can result from frequent usage of the question, "Why?"

## Time

Principals who intend to keep current about instructional matters will have to work diligently to realize their goal. The managerial aspects of the job can take up the majority of the principal's time, leaving him with very little energy or information about curricular matters. The experienced principal may have become so well adjusted to playing a minor role in instructional concerns that the adjustment has become a habit, often an unquestioned habit. The new principal who gives instructional leadership a low priority has only himself to blame if the habit stultifies him and his staff.

An NASSP publication by Gilbert Weldy presents excellent suggestions concerning the effective use of a principal's time.[1] Any principal who follows the advice given will gain many hours per week for productive work. The question of what to do with the time gained is answered by Weldy with a list of professionally worthwhile pursuits.

Rather than elaborate on this issue of time usage and priorities, the matter may take on significance if analyzed a slightly different way.

Some principals may not want to face the frustrations of leadership. Leadership requires decision making, which creates consequences. If one can be busy with things, he can excuse himself for having no time for ideas. Distributing school supplies takes a great deal of time and conscientious effort. The impact of this effort on the lives of people may be minimal, but the consequences are not threatening. When one realizes that he has the time to lead effectively, he will have to lead. He will not use time problems as an excuse.

The intelligent use of time for purposes of awareness concerning trends, reforms, and issues does not eliminate the need to pay attention to what is happening within the school. Since there is sometimes something interesting occurring outside the principal's office, frequent forays into the action arena should be considered. Those new principals who need no reminders of the dangers lurking in classrooms can reminisce with a minimum of gloating and gratitude. Those who have

[1] Gilbert R. Weldy, *Time: A Resource for the School Administrator* (Reston, Va: NASSP, 1974).

forgotten what the school is like can gain new insights merely by walking through the school, either alone or with the administrative team.

Just by being visible, the principal can motivate a few teachers to do a better job. As he observes the physical plant, the teaching environment, and the curriculum in operation, his very presence may induce some teachers and some custodians to try harder. The time spent in the halls, classrooms, shops, physical education areas, and the cafeteria can be valuable for all. The latter point is not intended, however, to provide an excuse for principals to swim all morning and to eat all afternoon.

## Associations

The new principal can learn a great deal from the national professional associations and their state level counterparts. Among the most important of these associations are the following:

- National Association of Secondary School Principals
- National Association of Elementary School Principals
- American Association of School Administrators
- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
- American Educational Research Association
- Regional accreditation associations.

Sometimes the associations seem to be remote, but they are actually as close as the telephone. Principals who are not impatient can use the mail to contact the associations.

To list the types of services provided by these professional groups would be of little value. Their membership literature describes in detail the goals, purposes, and services of each organization. Membership in NASSP for the secondary school administrator has several distinct benefits. On a pragmatic basis there are legal and financial advantages. Just as the AFT aids its members with legal advice, low cost liability insurance, and sometimes legal support for test cases, NASSP as a professional association for the administrator offers similar services. NASSP, in fact, includes an automatic liability insurance program for its members.

For the new principal who is not yet involved in litigation, the greatest advantage is probably the information service. When the complaint is raised that the principal is too busy to keep abreast of the times, one answer is to use the resources of NASSP. Studies, monographs, booklets, pamphlets, films, filmstrips, and special papers covering every aspect of the principalship are available.

In addition, conventions, conferences, institutes, and seminars are provided throughout the school year so that the inexperienced can learn

and the experienced can be re-motivated. Those principals who know everything can enjoy these types of association services as reinforcement sessions. The uninformed principal will have to be especially ingenious to avoid learning something.

NASSP as a national organization is in a position to explore more personal and agency contacts than any individual can pursue. The information sought, collected, and distributed can keep everyone in the profession aware and informed. At times the association takes a definite position on some controversial professional issue, but if the principal is as intelligent as he rates himself, he will be able to separate the value judgments from the facts. Often the position taken on negotiations, strikes, student involvement in decision making, and role definitions will guide the principal in the performance of his duties. By referring to the official position of his association, the principal can identify a respected source as a reason for his own stance.

## Related Nassp Publications

*Use of Computers in Instruction*, 1972
*NASSP Bulletin*, "School Environment and Learning," January 1973
*NASSP Bulletin* "Student Interests," Februar, 1974
*Time: A Valuable Resource for the School Administrator*, 1974.
*Continuing the Search*, 1975
*Curriculum Reports* on
"School-Supervised Work Education Programs," 1973
"Speaking of Choices: Part One of a Two-Part Discussion of Alternatives in English," 1973
"Making the Choices: Part Two of a Two-Part Discussion of Alternatives in English," 1973
"New Forms and Substance in Physical Education," 1974
"In Junior High and Middle Schools, Mathematics Programs are Changing," 1974
"Yes, Indeed, There Are . . . New Social Studies Programs," 1974
"Guidelines for School-to-College Transcript Content," 1974
"There is Evidence That . . . Technology Does Help!" 1974
"The Humanities in the Schools," 1974
"Community Service. One Path of Learning," 1975
"How To Be Resourceful in Centering Instructional Media," 1975
"EBCE: A Design for Career Education," 1975

# 5. Planning

## Opportunities

A new principal has an excellent opportunity to plan for the current year with or without the aid of previous plans in effect at his school. Much can be learned from existing rules, plans, routines, and expectations of the staff, and care should be taken to learn well. The fact that certain events or situations were handled without a hitch the previous year, however, is not a sufficient reason to avoid assessment of the specifics for the current year. The very nature of the event may be questioned, the organizational details may be questioned, and the impact may be questioned. The smoothness of the situation is no guarantee of its validity.

The previous situation (e.g., scheduling the students into study halls) may have been smooth because it was unchallenged or because it was the best of poor plans. The person who is the best golfer in his neighborhood and who shoots in the low 100's is a champion in his own right but he ought not compete as a professional golfer.

The new principal can make modifications which can be classified as his personal touch. Unless his modifications have negative effects upon serious matters of tradition or upon the power structure related to the school, his changes will be a sign of action. If the changes are assessed as good, he will have made some points. If the changes are assessed as bad, he can label them a trial balloon and retreat gracefully.

If there are no pre-existing plans, rules, guidelines, or routines for assessment, the new principal can be a pioneer. His plans will be evaluated but obviously not in comparison with an inherited situation. Principals who initiate a systems approach for teacher evaluation can take solace in the fact that the pitfalls inherent will not be attributed immediately to his lack of vision. He can condition all concerned to believe that this new plan will have to be given a fair trial of at least several years before it can be evaluated. In such instances, the new principal will not only gain time to perfect his plans but he will also gain some job security for a few years.

The principal should not spend all of his energies on one task or goal. The school operation is too complex, even in small schools for total concentration on one target except when a major problem of high priority arises. Priorities differ from place to place but reporting to the superintendent, satisfying the community, and exerting positive leadership in the school are always priorities.



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To spend too much attention on one matter may have an adverse effect upon other matters. For example, the principal who spends an inordinate amount of time in establishing a fool-proof bus route may have no energy left to supervise the instructional program. The procedures for collecting student fees may need revision but not at the expense of staff conferences. Although the open door policy, when permitted to the extreme, may cause incessant interruptions, the closed-mind policy of one thing at a time is probably worse.

The acceptance of this advice is not meant to suggest haphazard and whimsical attention to school matters. With sufficient competence as a given, planning and delegation of the principal's time and energy will enable him to perform most of his duties carefully and efficiently.

## *Decisions*

Some persons have difficulties in deciding what to eat for lunch. Priorities are recognized but not organized or implemented. Every situation becomes an emergency requiring some immediate delay in decision making.

In the field of administration, studies and suggestions abound concerning decisions: style, strategies, purposes, outcomes, rationale, perceptions, implications, and values. There are models to follow for decision making and there are step-by-step guidelines concerning the process and the involvement. What to read about the topics and which model to follow are decisions in themselves.

In the meantime, the bus is late, the band parents are planning an all-school picnic on the same day that the accreditation team will arrive, and three irate merchants are in the principal's office demanding that something be done to stop student thefts.

Decisions are easy when the matter and the ramifications are minor. Unfortunately, what is and what is not minor cannot always be anticipated. Thus, the principal will have to realize that decisions must be made and that all decisions have consequences. When the consequences are negative, the principal will have to decide on the next steps.

Implicit throughout this monograph is the importance of working with alternatives whenever decisions are involved. Because the variety and degree of alternatives are almost endless, a timid administrator can be so oriented to analyzing alternatives that no decision can be made. One who cannot decide what to eat for lunch can starve even at a smorgasbord.

To ignore alternatives is foolish; to seek alternatives to the point of inundation is a waste of time. If a mountain of evidence is necessary for a decision, the whole mountain range can be too cumbersome. A decision must result in some action. The problem is a noun; the solution is a verb, even if it is in the affective domain.

Ironically, no matter how objective and how scientific the administrator tries to be, the subjective elements of his decisions cannot be denied. All evaluation includes some kind of judgment. The new principal will have to guard against the temptation to be entirely subjective because he will be courted by many who seek favor. The new principal who was promoted from within the ranks may be surprised when former friendly and unfriendly peers attempt to gain special treatment.

The principal who is new to the school building will also be the target of favor seekers who hope to influence his subjectively derived decisions. Administrators often deny subjectivity in their decisions, but teachers and pressure groups seem to be fully aware of this fact of life. Capriciousness and flagrant favoritism in decision making are abuses. Insistence on complete objectivity in decision making is semantically, psychologically, and philosophically unattainable.

The principal should not be so fearful of mistakes that he does nothing. It is impossible to avoid mistakes of judgment. Certainly, caution and careful analysis are parts of intelligent decision making, but not even stock market brokers are infallible despite inside information. If mistakes are inevitable, the trick is to make as few serious mistakes as possible.

A principal who admits to himself that he has made a mistake has many alternatives to pursue.

1. He can admit the mistake to others and remedy the situation. (This course of action is so simple, startling, and effective that it should be considered only by the adventurous types.)
2. He can blame the assistant principal. (This course of action works best when the assistant principal is inexperienced.)
3. He can blame the staff.
4. He can blame the secretary.
5. He can blame the superintendent and/or board members. (This course of action should be considered only by those skilled in conflict and/or job hunting.)
6. He can blame the inadequacy of the information received which led to the decision.

7. He can blame the changing societal conditions which preclude any definitive conclusions.
8. He can blame the school-community for failing to share his vision. (This course of action is seldom useful unless the self-proclaimed visionary has another administrative position lined up in another district.)

## Related Nassp Publications

*Alternative Paths to the High School Diploma*, 1973

*NASSP Bulletin*, "Alternatives in Public Education: Movement or Fad?" September 1973

*NASSP Bulletin*, "The Assistant Principal: Involvement for Effectiveness," October 1973

*The 80s: Where Will The Schools Be?* 1974

*NASSP Bulletin*, "The Year-Round School and Individualization," April 1975

*NASSP Bulletin*, "Quality Education—The Only Alternative," May 1975

# 6. Inservice and Evaluation

## Basic Concerns

Inservice and evaluation concerns are directly affected by the nature and scope of the principal's authority. The limit and prerogatives of the principal's authority can be determined by reading the rules and regulations, by establishing further rules and regulations, and by observing how teachers react to the principal's position. Some of the interpretations will be based on fact, some on fancy, and some on projection and perception.

With confusion concerning the amount and degree of authority, what the principal does is bound to be questioned. The timid principal will be too reserved in his actions. The adventurous principal will take advantage of the confusion and develop his own job description. If he is censured, he can claim good intentions. The salient point is that the authority of the principal must be clear at least to him, if not to anyone else.

The nature of the inservice sessions should be related to the objectives of the instructional program. Similarly, evaluation should be directly related to these objectives. If the school program is organized around the achievement of objectives, much of what is needed for inservice will become clear when the degree of success in reaching the objectives is measured. This measurement can be subjective or objective, but the outcomes can serve as clear directions for inservice programs.

When principals ask what teachers are interested in and what purposes are to be served by inservice, the answers should be clear from the nature of the instructional program. Teachers will need help in new methodology, new organizational patterns, use of new materials, application of newer educational concepts to the teaching and learning process, and the like.

In addition to the newer approaches and applications for instructional purposes (e.g. individualization, inquiry, humanization), inservice is needed on conventional questions such as:

- How does one motivate the slow learner?
- How shall grading procedures be carried out?
- How can discipline problems be minimized?
- How much homework, if any, should be given to students?
- How can the library and/or resource center be used effectively?
- What types of student records should be maintained?

- What kinds of instructional objectives can be developed and measured?
- What are legal issues affecting teaching?

In essence, the topics for inservice should be practical and relevant. The criteria for determining practicality and relevance can be those from the principal's judgment, those from the teachers' judgment, or a combination of both. The source of these judgments and the judgments themselves are a type of evaluation. If the principal is not certain as to what the teachers are interested in, certainly he can ask them. Since he is not obliged to follow their interests, he loses nothing by asking questions.

An alert principal will notice what needs the teachers have and will make efforts to meet them. If the teachers are reluctant to accept the kinds of needs determined by the principal as worthy of inservice topics, the principal need not despair. He can tap strengths by plotting, maneuvering, coercing, cajoling, and planning so that key staff members will assist to initiate, implement, and demonstrate techniques, problems, and issues for inservice consideration.

Whether or not the entire staff is to be involved in specific inservice sessions is another matter for professional judgment. If the nature of the inservice is particular to one segment of the staff, obviously, the entire staff need not be involved in the effort. Matters of grading, motivation, and discipline are certainly issues related to all segments of the school staff. Similarly, inservice dealing with new methods and new ideas in education, which will affect clearly and directly the teachers' role, are legitimate areas of concern for inservice.

The foregoing comments can help the new principal who wishes to involve the staff in planning inservice sessions and in evaluating the school's program. If the principal's authority is clearly understood by all concerned, he can develop appropriate alternative strategies. New principals cannot be blamed if they recognize the fact that there is an oversupply of teachers in the market. New principals who exercise their authority so that needed inservice as well as intelligent evaluation of the school's efforts become realities may surprise everyone by achieving their goals.

## *Inservice Projects*

Principals have been known to complain about the difficulties in changing a staff from one stance to another. If the anticipated change is dramatic and pervasive, the plans must be especially intelligent in design

and especially rewarding in operation. Such dramatic changes include an adoption of a modular schedule for the entire school, incorporation of a differentiated staffing pattern, introduction of merit pay, and similar major efforts. Principals who make serious errors in these types of changes can fall into troubled times.

The new principal should be especially careful about initiating major changes too soon. Of course, if he is an expert in something like team teaching, for example, he may have been employed for the explicit purpose of initiating teaming in the school. To delay this initiation may not be too wise. The determination of how quickly to initiate major change is based upon a variety of factors, but, generally, major change should be implemented with great care and with at least the verbal contributions of staff.

The alert and persuasive new principal should encourage teachers to become involved in mini-projects that are meaningful to them. Teachers may enjoy as well as benefit from working on projects such as these:

- differentiated homework assignments
- modification of scheduled classes through a simple rotation schedule
- variation in means of evaluating pupil performance
- increased use of library or resource center
- survey of teacher strengths
- up-dating rules and regulations for the building
- use of student leadership
- use of team teaching for one unit of a subject or related subjects
- modification of the classroom environment for one marking period.

The advantages which derive from good results will benefit staff and students. The disadvantages can be analyzed on their own merits as inherent or related problems. Positive outcomes can be repeated and negative outcomes can be rejected for further use. In either case, the staff and the administrator will have learned something from their involvement in an inservice experience which emphasizes practical action.

The success of most projects is often the result of the positive attitude of the participants. With few exceptions, when a staff is willing to exert extra time and effort in achieving a goal, the process and the product are usually positive, if not entirely successful. A principal cannot rely solely upon this happy state when he considers the involvement of staff in an action project. Too many chance factors exist when the emphasis is on

some abstract feeling, sentiment, or attitude, especially when the staff has experienced sensitivity training. Some type of structure is necessary.

If a structure is too broad or too narrow, most of its advantage is lost. Teachers are accustomed to complaining when they are not directed clearly as well as when they are given too little latitude. The new principal cannot afford to waste time trying to provide the perfect structure for imperfect people. The following structure is offered as a simple, workable, effective plan for any project.

1. project title
2. progress (what has happened)
3. my role
4. side effects
5. evaluation
6. next steps.

While engaged in these types of projects, the principal can learn much about his own leadership strengths and weaknesses as well as those of the staff. Moreover, he will learn what kinds of things the superintendent supports and rejects. The principal should not be more concerned with pleasing the superintendent than in doing a good job in order to satisfy the needs of staff and students. The very nature of leadership and decision making includes some elements of risk.

The idea of taking a risk is not meant to suggest that someone be ridiculous in his efforts to antagonize and to intimidate members of the power structure. An intelligent risk-taker will be ever-mindful of the ramifications of his actions. The very nature of the principalship, however, is laden with risks. Since one will be damned for doing as well as damned for not doing, it is much more fun to be damned for doing. Those who like what has been done will go out of their way to recommend the principal for another job as he leaves his present one. Those who did not like what the principal did will become enemies sooner or later, anyway.

An additional thought along these lines is the need to develop the kind of integrating philosophy which pulls together all that the principal plans to do. Some principals perform their tasks with skill but without any careful analysis of the purpose behind their performance. The pragmatic advantages of holding the position are obvious to all. The broader and deeper philosophical reasons attendant to being a principal are those that should be considered carefully. Those who manage well and those who lead well should stop to find out why they are managing and where

their decisions are leading the enterprise. Unless there is some kind of integrating philosophy compatible with school district policy and with state laws, the principal will find himself an unhappy fellow in his situation.

## Related Nassp Publications

*NASSP Bulletin*, "Planning Viable Options," November 1972
*NASSP Bulletin*, "Innovation—What Is Expected?" February 1973
*NASSP Bulletin*, "Career Education," March 1973
*NASSP Bulletin*, "Improving Schools," December 1973
*Sharper Tools for Better Learning*, 1973
*25 Action Learning Schools*, 1974

# 7. Morale

## Major Factors

When principals consider factors of morale, they should start with the simplest techniques possible. The reason for emphasis on simplicity is that, in essence, no one knows for certain what good morale really is, what it entails, how to promote it forever, and how to evaluate it when it does exist. Whether from the point of view of the abstractness of the concept or from the point of view of the talent needed to implement the concept, simplicity is the by-word for success.

Many guidelines have been published for principals in matters of developing morale among the staff. These guidelines, when reduced to their essence, tell the principal to be a warm human being himself, to smile often, to encourage open communications with staff members, and to follow through on his promises. The details of such guidelines are elaborated upon in many journal articles and textbooks. Most principals are well aware of these details, as well as the importance of good morale in a school.

The problem, however, is that many principals do not take the time to try to assess the situation in their school prior to working on morale issues. For example, a principal may decide on his own without benefit of information or evidence that the staff needs to be a happier bowling group. Thus, he may form a bowling team and to his suprise he will find that his teachers have discovered that tennis is not a game just for the rich and that they would prefer to be tennis experts rather than bowling buds.

The principal who belatedly learns that his efforts to promote harmony among the staff through recreational pursuits may be dismayed to know that his efforts have failed. The reason for the failure in the example cited is not the effort, but the specific direction of the effort. The principal should be well aware of whether his staff members are more interested in bowling, tennis, golfing, or sensitivity training for recreational purposes. Other games may be high priorities among staff members, but good judgment should prevail before the principal encourages the staff to develop morale through games and other activities that are not necessarily welcomed in any given community.

In addition to the guidelines on morale included in books and journals, several studies point out the cause of low morale among staff members. These studies, whether old or new, focus on the same points. Teachers like to be treated as people. Teachers like to be able to do their

work without needless and incessant interruptions. Teachers like to have a voice in some of the school's management and instructional leadership.

The list is long but the points are clear: morale is usually at a high level in any school where there is a feeling of community, a feeling of congeniality, and a spirit of cooperation among the majority of staff members. The principal who tries to please the entire staff in every aspect of his leadership role will fail dismally. The staff is not a collection of similar people. The staff is a collection of individuals of different tastes, talents, interests, and enthusiasms.

The principal should be more concerned with a general feeling of good will, commonly called positive morale, in his school than with pleasing every single individual on every step of the way. If the principal will aim for the former goal, general happiness and positive morale among staff, he will be able to develop those specific benchmarks to evaluate his progress.

If the principal tries to please everyone in all respects, he will find the task impossible. Moreover, he will probably end up disliking himself. Perhaps that result will allow him to see himself as the teachers see him, but that insight may not be worth the risk.

## *Open-Door Policy*

In order to help promote positive morale, many principals have what they call an open-door policy. Too often, however, this policy is merely an excuse for not doing anything. Principals can sit with their door open and their minds vacant waiting for people to ask them for help on some matter. Sometimes the open-door creates a draft that blows out any ideas that otherwise could exist. Truly, most principals do believe in openness, in honesty, in clear communications, and in relating well with people. They work hard to keep morale high and deserve commendation.

What many of these principals do not realize is that to be open, honest, and available are not enough. There must be some routine, some regulation, some organizational plan so that the business of conducting the school can continue. To be open at all times, no matter what the purpose, is to invite other things and people to occupy all of one's time, including the time waiting for people to realize that the time is available.

No matter how the principal uses the time allotted to him during the school day, just so much is available. He certainly must attend to some of the managerial aspects of his job. He certainly must serve as an educational leader and as an educational spokesman in the community for at least part of his time. He certainly should spend some time conferring

with teachers about instructional and curricular matters. If he did no more than these things, he would find it difficult to keep his door open to anyone who might walk in at any time with any problem whether or not he is able to help the person.

The last point is worthy of elaboration. Many principals are willing to help everybody and anybody at all times, but may not have the necessary competence to do so. In spite of previous training and experiences, many matters will be beyond his skill and insight. The principal should not get so involved listening to psychological, marital, and spiritual problems that he has no time left to help people do a better job of teaching and learning.

Granting the importance of human relationships, the principal must focus his expertise on the major goals of the school as an institution. If the open door is truly open at all times, there will be little time to do anything but wait, serve, and postpone planning. Although the practice is not common, teachers have used the open-door policy as a scheme to tie up the principal's time so that he will be unable to get out of the office. The inexperienced principal need not turn in his smile button immediately, but he should know that teachers, too, can manipulate.

## *Concerns*

Among the talents that distinguish the successful principal from the unsuccessful one is the ability to anticipate problems before they arise. The morale factors are obvious. It is not difficult to find out quickly what the major issues are in any school building or in any school district. A fast reading of school board minutes and of newspaper accounts of school district meetings, conversations with teachers and with fellow administrators, discussions with the superintendent, intelligent observations, being a good listener—all will give indications as to what the major concerns are in the school district.

Thus, knowledge of these matters is not a question of anticipation. Knowledge of these matters is merely using one's head to find out the nature of the game he is playing. Moreover, the major concerns are usually beyond the authority level of the principal. Knowledge of these factors may help the new principal to impress the superintendent with his awareness, but often no other real value exists. With the complexities that are inherent in the principal's job, he cannot be aware of everything affecting him. He cannot afford, however, to ignore the signs of impending problems for purposes of morale and effectiveness.

Specifically, he can anticipate situations if he does the following:

1. Confer with teachers informally and formally.
2. Confer with custodians.
3. Confer with secretaries and clerks.
4. Walk the halls periodically to assess "student climate."
5. Visit classrooms often for purposes of supervision and management control.
6. Perform tasks delegated by the superintendent without delay and without excuses.

For example, principals who know what teachers gripe about can pour salve on minor wounds so that major surgery will be averted. By conferring with teachers he can learn their dissatisfactions. Among the most common gripes are these:

- interruptions
- overcrowded conditions
- unattractive rooms
- lack of instructional equipment
- confusion over scholastic standards
- too much clerical work
- discipline problems
- inadequate display areas
- fear of being misunderstood by community
- expectations that teachers be paragons of virtue
- lack of parental cooperation in school matters
- lack of acceptance as a person
- confusion concerning innovative practices
- lack of common understanding about school objectives
- lack of real group cohesiveness among the staff
- little time for relaxation during school day
- lack of positive reinforcement from all sources.

A simple survey of one's staff and student body will reveal potential problem areas. If the principal does not wish to risk a survey, he can read the professional literature to find studies of gripes. No matter whether the principal accepts the gripes as legitimate, knowledge of them can direct his strategies for dealing with them. If the principal tries to deal effectively with gripes and is found wanting, he may be able to learn from his mistakes and then develop the competence to be effective in Round 2. To lose the support of faculty through ignorance and default is inexcusable—and it is no fun.

## Related Nassp Publications

*How Students Rate Their Schools and Teachers*, 1971
*NASSP Bulletin*, "Humanizing The Schools," February 1972
*NASSP Bulletin*, "Evaluation and Supervision," December 1974
*Mood of American Youth*, 1974

# 8. Legal Factors

One of the most perplexing aspects of the principalship is the question of the principal and the law. So many complexities exist in this area that the best advice for principals, experienced or inexperienced, is to seek the advice of a competent attorney prior to making any decision that has obvious legal implications. The very fact that the principal sought some advice from an appropriate legal source is often sufficient to allow him to be spared when the attorney gets into trouble.

Certainly, a principal's every action has many legal implications. Many of these actions, however, have such subtle implications that they seldom are recognized by the principal or by the public affected by the decision. One of the safeguards for any principal relative to legal considerations is that the public is usually at least as ignorant as he is about the law. This safeguard is safe only when the public does not exercise any legal recourse open to it.

When the question is obviously legal, however, such as abridging a school mandate, failing to file proper reports, failing to provide the type of transportation mandated by law, failing to follow the policies of the school board, or performing any action which may be interpreted as a violation of student rights, the principal should seek legal counsel. In many school districts, an attorney's services are available to the principal. In all states, legal counsel is available through the State Department of Education. A superintendent or a school board may give help. In the latter instance, the principal may not receive proper legal advice, but he will show prudence by soliciting help from his superiors.

In the selection of an attorney, care must be taken. Many well-intentioned attorneys are unable to be of much help to the school district. The mere possession of a legal degree does not guarantee knowledge of school matters. The selection, however, is seldom a decision of the principal. Usually, the attorney who aids school personnel is selected by the school board to work primarily on school board matters. The principal can serve the board well by pointing out the need for special legal talents for school district purposes.

Among the most likely issues which may pose legal problems for the secondary school principal are the following:

student rights
discipline cases

privacy of student records
underground student newspapers
dress of students
hair length of students
free expression of students
participation in school athletics
suspension and expulsion of students
experiments in shops, laboratories, and home economics
physical education activities
field trips and excursions of all types
transportation of students
attendance of students
truancy matters
early dismissal for work purposes
supervision during unscheduled time
interpretation of negotiated agreements
dismissal of certificated employees.

Since it is almost impossible for the busy principal to keep up with the trends and specific decisions of court cases, he should have reliable sources of information.

The National Association of Secondary School Principals keeps its members informed of significant legal findings through bulletins, announcements, and conferences.* Because the issues are so complex, the principal must be especially careful to avoid overstepping his legal bounds. When a court case does ensue, there is no comfort, no solace, no safeguard in matters of ignorance in the sight of the law.

The principal should be aware that in legal matters the key question is whether he acted prudently. Prudence is defined in the law as acting in the way that a reasonable adult would act under like circumstances. Negligence is the opposite of prudence. Within these broad definitions that the courts have accepted, a great deal of room exists for interpretation, judgment, and decision making. The principal, therefore, need not be too afraid to act as long as he can prove that he acted prudently.

The problem, of course, is that decision makers in a court of law may not share the principal's ideas of prudence. Moreover, they themselves may be imprudent people in the first place. The best advice for a

*Legal Memorandum* is published bimonthly during the school year. Other vehicles include a monthly column in the NASSP *Newsletter* and *Bills and Particulars*, which is sent to all state association officials for use in their publications.

principal, therefore, is to avoid legal problems at all costs, psychologically as well as materially.

What can a principal do?

1. He should study the school laws in his state very carefully. He should ask questions about any laws that he does not understand. He should get opinions from the adviser and legal counsel of the State Education Department in matters which he, the principal, does not understand.
2. He should study the policies and the rules and regulations of the school district. Any violation of these matters can lead to legal problems.
3. He should seek the advice of counsel when he faces a serious question that he cannot handle himself.
4. He should try to read as much as he can in the professional journals in order to keep abreast broadly of what is happening in the legal field.
5. He should take a course in school law.

## Related Nassp Publications

*Legal Memoranda* on

"The Regulation of Student Hair Styles," 1969
"Student Publications," 1971
"The Confidentiality of Pupil School Records," 1971
"Search and Seizure: Right to Privacy," 1972
"Smoking in the Public Schools," 1972
"The Energy Crisis," 1973
"The Administrator's Right to Continuing Employment," 1973
"The Legal Status of the Principal," 1973
"Non-Student Use of School Property: Civil Liberties vs. Public Responsibility," 1973
"Student Marriage and Pregnancy," 1973
"Gender and Sexual Mores in Educational Employment," 1974
"Non-Public Schools and the Fourteenth Amendment," 1974
"School Communications: Duties and Dangers," 1974
"The Age of Majority," 1974
"Student Discipline, Suspension and Expulsion," 1975
"Responsibilities for Student Injury Occurring Off School Property," 1975
"Negligence—When Is the Principal Liable?" 1975

# 9. Tips

In addition to whatever ideas may be derived from the narrative in this booklet, the following list is provided for purposes of specific tips:

1. Be honest with people for purposes of integrity (and for making them wonder why you are so honest).
2. Don't play favorites.
3. Don't overpower the staff with your wisdom.
4. Keep carbon copies of every written communication.
5. Ask provocative questions to keep the staff alert as well as to show your insights into important topics.
6. Maintain the right to develop agendas for meetings.
7. Be positive.
8. Keep veto power.
9. Don't be so democratic that you allow your job to be deleted.
10. Develop alternatives to be used when Plan A fails.

# 10. Conclusion

Being a principal in today's schools involves so many aspects that one hardly knows where to begin or where to end a description or an analysis of that role. Much of what has been presented in this booklet is intended to give the new principal, and as many experienced principals who need the help, some concrete suggestions to help them do the job efficiently. All that is presented in this booklet is intended to develop a level of awareness among new principals so that they can utilize those strategies that will benefit them in the performance of their duties.

If a principal notices important areas of administration omitted from treatment in this booklet, his recognition of what has been omitted indicates his knowledge and awareness. If the alleged practical hints are not sufficiently practical, they can be modified by the practitioner to give them the added practical flavor that he believes is needed.

If this booklet has helped any principal to look more closely at his job, to assess some of his needs and strategies, and/or work more diligently to be a successful leader in the school, then its purpose has been served.

If the purpose has not been achieved, the blame rests squarely on the author who was unable to share his insights in practical matters of leadership with the reader. This self-effacing statement is valid only if those who read the booklet spend sufficient time analyzing what has been said, as well as what has not been said.